

FACT SHEET

What is the difference between cultural interpreter and a community interpreter?

In Canada numerous terms have been used interchangeably in reference to community interpreting. These include: "public service interpreting", "cultural interpreting", "dialogue interpreting", "institutional interpreting", "liaison interpreting" and "ad hoc interpreting". The terms community interpreter and cultural interpreter are used frequently in the Ontario; however, the terms have very different meanings and the interchangeable use of these terms can be problematic.

Community Interpretation

Community Interpretation is bidirectional interpreting that takes place in the course of communication among speakers of different languages. The context is the provision of public services such as healthcare or community services and in settings such as government agencies, community centres, legal settings, educational institutions, and social services. The role of the interpreter is to facilitate verbal communication by conveying as faithfully as possible a message between two parties who do not share a common language. Faithfully is defined as interpretation that preserves the meaning of the message, without omissions, additions or alterations.¹ Further, the interpreter must be able to understand and convey cultural nuances without assuming the role of advocate or cultural broker.²

Cultural Interpretation

On the other hand, the cultural interpreter is an advocate or "cultural broker". For example, health organizations may employ interpreters who also act as culture brokers in assessing patients and providing meaningful interpretation of their clinical problems. The interpreter acts in collaboration with the service provider in generating the cultural formulation and recommendation. In this context, the interpreter should speak the specific dialect of the patient and be well versed with local knowledge, cultural beliefs, and practices of the patient's cultural group. The interpreter should be aware of his/her own values, biases and emotional reactions to patients' material and be comfortable with cultural differences in relationships.³

In the current movement to professionalize community interpretation, many industry leaders argue that the community interpreter should be unbiased and objective in faithfully communicating information between the service provider and service recipient. This view assumes cultural competence on the part of the service provider.

¹ Healthcare Interpretation Network. (2007). *National Standard Guide for Community Interpretation Services*. Retrieved 02 21, 2010, from: <http://healthcareinterpretation.homestead.com/standards.html>

² Ibid

³ <http://www.mcgill.ca/culturalconsultation/handbook/culture-broker/>

Funded by:

Financé par :



Citizenship and
Immigration Canada

Citoyenneté et
Immigration Canada